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## DRAMA

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### I. The Function of Dramatic Expression in Education

Our modern life is tending to absorption; it is a world of books to be read to oneself, of plays to be looked at, of pictures to be seen, of lectures to be listened to, of music to be heard. Most of us spend our days gathering in: we have no time or reason to act out. So our natural impulses to express die; our outlets of expression become choked. In our schools we now recognize the consequent dangers to mentality, and we are teaching our children to paint, to draw, to model, to sew, to cook, to sing, to dance, to construct, in order that thinking shall be more vivid and true, that mind may acquire a usable stock of real thought material. There is, too, a somewhat more subtle danger in this continual inhibition of the impulse to express. We who have no powers of expression often feel ourselves imprisoned, baffled. There comes to us, for instance, that one perfect spring day that lights the fires of ecstasy within us. If we could sing, if we could dance, if we could play a violin, if we could chant poetry, we should burst into expression, and the joy that is bubbling in our hearts would flood our whole beings and refresh the very roots of our natures. But we can only stand and gaze and are of necessity dumb. Something breaks and dies within us, and we turn to our work embittered and a-hunger. Or perhaps the spring gladness, not to be denied, drives our unpracticed feet into their only dance measure, a clog, and our intractable voices to a shout. The ugly unfitness of the result shocks the joy back to its lair, and we awake disillusioned and disgusted. I have an idea that with training in artistic expression a good deal of the hobble-de-hoy celebration of New Year's eve and Halloween could be turned into fairly beautiful singing and mumming and dancing. Perhaps with a little help our animal spirits might boil over into something of the type of the old Greek chorus or the Morris dancers, and we all should feel the better for it. The expressive man moreover, is the socially useful man—open to appeals, contributing of himself, influencing his fellows. He can even serve as interpreter and spokesman for the dumb and so relieve a little the oppressiveness of their enforced silence. And without facile expression among us,

and more yet, without the quick, responsive emotion that is the child of expression, national art, and high national art standards are impossible. For the salvation of our individual souls, and of the social soul, we must keep emotion and expressiveness alive.

The play is but one means of self-expression, but it seems to me one of the most satisfactory for us teachers. For one thing, it gives a more varied training to the individual than does sketching or dancing or singing; for it demands graceful and interpretative use of the body, it requires good manipulation of the speech organs, and it trains the ear and the mind to an appreciation of literary beauty. Nor are these fictitious values of acting. I have heard a girl's very slovenly and all but unintelligible mumble quite transformed into nice articulation when she was impersonating a gracious queen. I remember a slouching, furtive-mannered lad who as Ulysses bore himself like a king and won the respect of his mates. I saw an eighth-grade boy make what seemed to me the effort of his life in trying to loosen his jaw and open his mouth and control his breath for the purpose of making intelligible a much loved part in a play. Of course it needs more swallows than that one to make his summer, but if they were lacking it was the fault of the teacher and not a shortcoming in the power of drama. Another advantage of the play is that few other kinds of work produce such joy in the workers. Among children under the supersensitive and self-conscious adolescent age I do not remember one who has not chanted paean during all the hard work of a play:—and to create happiness is, I take it, one right educational aim. It is a harmless gratification to a teacher, moreover, and one rarely granted her, to have her children produce something that unprejudiced outsiders can really enjoy. Their paintings are, after all is said and done, not things of beauty; their mothers could improve on their stitches; their modeling is almost an eyesore, but people actually do enjoy their plays. And besides, the product is temporary; it does not stand up brazenly, to shame its producers after a year's growth.

Drama is, too, an inherently socializing force. Every child recognizes that the play without the audience is bare. Acting is expression definitely for some one and to some one. There is, even, a social something in the air that answers to the actor's effort. He feels interest radiate from the house, and it is his thanks and reward. Moreover, the cast is essentially a team, work-

ing together toward the right presentation of their idea. The individuals are subordinated to the accomplishment of the group purpose, and more or less consciously so. An eighth grade girl said, in connection with her part in a recent play, "I have always felt that the audience was watching me, and seeing all the mistakes I made. The practicing of the play has shown me that the audience is not watching me, a separate one, but is watching the whole as a picture. They are thinking of the play, not of me in the play."

A large part of morals, besides, lies in the perception of the fact that every human action is the result of some motive or other; that people differ, but that there are reasons for that difference. Drama (no matter how rudimentary) is a presentation of that fact of actuating motive, is character study, is elementary psychology—a guide to one's own behavior and to sympathetic understanding of one's fellows. "You ought to swallow your anger," I heard a fourth grader advise a turbulent classmate after the enacting of the quarrel scene between Agamemnon and Achilles. The very vividness and specious reality of a play, combined with the apparent absence of personal preaching, emphasizes the moral points as few other art forms do. We feel as though we had seen a bit (and a well selected, well pruned bit) of real life, or as though we had passed through an actual experience of our own. Acting or seeing a play is, indeed, a vicarious way of getting experience, and experience is the best teacher. Here is the final speech of a play, that during rehearsals sank into the hearts of a whole fourth grade, as many equally eloquent sermons had failed to do. A little orphan girl has changed into a princess, and her peasant foster father says: "Here is the plate from which she ate and the cup from which she drank! She is a princess! 'Tis a sign, wife, that we must be careful what we say and do, for who knows how many of the folks we meet may be royal?"

It is an inspiring thing to be dealing with an impulse so deeply rooted in human psychology as this dramatic one. I am not so prejudiced as to think that one play will regenerate a lost soul, but I do believe that the most potent agency in mental and moral growth is a broad development of the powers of expression, and that one of the most usable and effective of these forms is the dramatic.

The school stage and the professional stage are things quite

separate, I am sure. The professional aims, I hope, to give an artistic performance, but at any cost it must be a successful one, for it takes applause and money to make the dramatic mare go. Whereas, in school plays, the performance is the thing of all things least important. What we watch for there and gloat over when we see it, is growth in the actor—a freeing of the bound wings of imagination, perhaps; the tapping of a secret reservoir of emotion; the quickening of human sympathy; the birth of joy in a small cramped soul; the establishing of wholesome interests; the opening of ears to beauty of words and tones; down to the improvement of speech and carriage. One hardly imagines a professional stage manager choosing an actress for Rosalind because that particular woman needs to be taught to be happy and gay. Neither does he often, we surmise, pick out a shiftless, dejected failure to play Mercutio, in order that the social use of his one accomplishment of skilful fencing may put his self-respect on its feet and so invigorate his whole life. Nor would he deliberately put on a mumbler for Brutus, in order that the purity and dignity of the language and the joy of acting might stimulate him to welcome the drudgery of learning to speak properly. Doubtless he does not, either, choose his play because it is the one best fitted to feed the starving souls of his cast—Julius Caesar to satisfy the balked political ambitions of his men, the Land of Heart's Desire to give his feminine star an opportunity to express her vague, adolescent nostalgia for a universe different and nobler, and so to hearten her up a bit. But these are the things we teachers must continually do. Is our Titania fat and clumsy and squeaky voiced? What cares the gratified teacher, if the child, notwithstanding, has learned to see fairies where before were only street cars and smoky bricks? Our aim is to educate, not to gain applause. It is the world our children "carry around under their hats" that we are concerned with, not the impression they make upon the public.

The best kind of play for children will conform to most of the artistic requirements of mature drama. There must be an interesting plot, and it must be worked out on the stage, not behind the scenes; there must be an element of suspense, that climaxes and is satisfied near the end of the play; the dialogue must be of sufficient amplitude and grace to cover the bones of the plot; the persons of the play ought to be conceived of as characters and not

as stalking horses for the events. But there are other essentials of a child's play as distinguished from the mature drama. The characters must have no subtlety, but must be splashed on in black and white; the situations must be clear cut, with no possible equivocation as to right and wrong; for we cannot afford to run the risk of our untrained auditors becoming confused. The plot ought to work out happily, so that we shall have a gratified sigh and feel that "all's right with the world." Children rebel against the lugubriousness and uncertainty at the end that we grown-up people often relish.

The form of the play seems to me of great importance, on account of its relation to thinking and to effect. The form must, of course, vary with the ages of participants. The all but unpremeditated mimicry and pantomime of the kindergarten and primary grades is the best means of preserving the happy, unconscious expressiveness that is natural to little children. And even artistic fitness demands that babies shall play like babies, with all their natural abandonment to joy; with all their inconsequence and lack of sustained attention. We must not, by demanding over-much finish, stultify the expressiveness of children, whose analytical powers have hardly begun to develop.

Playing house, or fire engine, or conductor; acting out of fairy stories as they themselves plan, with chairs for a house, and a desk for a cave, is feeding digestible food to the dramatic impulse, strengthening it in a habit of expressing itself. A consciousness of fuller representation than they themselves are capable of would be cultivated, if little children took simple parts now and then in bigger children's plays. To be a fairy to an eighth grade girl's fairy queen must wholesomely raise the standard of finish for a first grader. Would it not be good for us, teachers and children, to act plays together? In the ECOLE DES ROCHES this is the usual custom.

In the intermediate grades, children allow less crudity in their vehicle of expression than they permitted in the first grade. They have begun to glimpse character; they love beautiful language, and a critical attitude toward their own creation and other people's has grown up. There are added to the kindergarten play a more sustained plot, some differentiation of character, less hurry in the telling of the story, and an attempt at beauty of language. But the children have little sense of general form. Their scenes

will flit from place to place *ad absurdum*, and will be most unsatisfyingly short, so that the entre-actes will consume as much time as the play itself. I once helped a fourth grade to make a play of Ulysses which required ten minutes to present and had seven acts, strung all the way from Lotus-land to Ithaca. It seems to me wrong to allow such looseness of structure. It means loose thinking on the part of the makers of the play, insufficiently sustained effort in the actors, and a confusion and lack of vivid impression in the audience. And if a curtain is drawn between acts, there is a yet more disastrous effect in the nervous excitement that always seems to result among children from this magic act—the audience goes to pieces. One interesting method of beginning to draw away from this loose form is to have more than one stage. This corner of the room is the castle yard; that one is the interior of the church, here is the river bank; actors move from the court yard to the church and back again as need is. The audience only turn their heads, and the play is continuous to its climax. But a little farther on, why not try the plan of molding the play into one act, as often as we can? This seems to me a most desirable solution of the problem. It conduces to vividness and chasteness of effect and to closeness of thinking. It compels attention in the audience and preserves illusion. It is the very essence of simplicity. Why should we not adopt a literary form so perfect in itself and so well adapted to our conditions? Add to its traditional unities a few other characteristics, and we shall have a well fitting dramatic garment for our immaturity. Let us, for one thing, have a mob, when we can. It is very useful. It expands the cast and gives opportunity for many children to act. It is a cloak under which shy people may very freely express themselves with the comforting delusion that they are not seen.

We shall succeed better, too, the further removed our play is from mere talking dialogue, and the nearer it is to pantomime. Amateur acting is surer to "get over the footlights" if the climax is dependent upon the slash of a sword rather than upon heroic speech. It is safe from the point of view of effect, and from the opposite view of actors' comfort and training, for child's play, to be full of business—real business—not artificially devised stage movements—setting a table, putting on a cloak, sweeping, shaking hands, lighting a candle, paying money, handling of real or imaginary materials. But the material and the handling must be neces-

sary to the presenting of the plot—not something dragged in to supply movement. The speeches of a child's play, too, ought to be short and very simple, almost conversational. So we get natural, interpretative rendering. A long speech, in itself unfitting because it is unchildlike, besides overburdens the young actor's memory, and by throwing him into the limelight induces self-consciousness.

Another matter that we must have an eye to and another thing in which primary and grammar grade plays differ is plot. Plays for older children must be possible to human action. Imagine people of the eighth grade acting "Three Billy Goats Gruff!" But it perfectly fits little children. I saw the bridge made out of a kindergarten table, with a chair at each end for steps. Whether it was goats or children that crossed and outwitted the ogre, the pleased audience did not care. But even at the lower end of the grade ladder we must recognize that there are things that ought not to be acted. A story dependent for meaning and climax upon a magic act loses credence by being played. Cinderella is much better heard than seen. It is a similar mistake to try to impersonate things not impersonable. I read of the prize instance of this error. In a play that occurred by the sea, several children aimed to represent waves by lying down upon their stomachs and occasionally thumping the floor. Many plots, moreover, are narrative and not dramatic. A really dramatic plot is in essence a climax, while narrative plot is development. For example, the point of the story of "Robert of Sicily" is a gradual change in Robert's character. The process of this slow change we cannot show in drama—merely the conditions before and after the change. Whereas, the alteration in Achilles' action after the quarrel is dependent upon one swift, visible event—the death of Patroclus. We must present only those subjects that will gain by dramatic presentation. In our enthusiasm for the play, we must not forget that the story is an effective kind of teaching and a beautiful art form and that oral reading, as distinguished from acting, is a compelling manner of expression.

My experience has been that children act best the plays that they themselves have made; for the quality of the acting depends in great part upon the vividness of the imagery, and of course one knows one's own creations better than other people's. We always give best expression to an idea that springs from a back-

ground rich in experience and association, an idea that carries from that rich background an aura of emotion. So children that are studying Greeks put into the action of a Greek play something that they cannot give to a milkmaid play, and the best knights for a drama are the boys who are modeling castles, reading King Arthur, wearing armor every day. The further advantages of the children's making their own plays are obvious. It reacts upon the subject matter which is serving as dramatic material by enforcing a reviewing, analyzing, weighing, correcting of it. Children who have made an Achilles play know their Iliad much better through that act. Such composition takes a high place, too, in English training. The importance of the play to the children's minds sets a high standard of judgment, quickens imaginative speech, and stimulates the effort after satisfying form. "It sounds too funny," "It sounds too common," or "too modern," I have heard children say of a suggested speech. Thereupon began more vigorous creation under this helpfully searching criticism. The whole creative and artistic faculty at such times is set a thrill; all forms of art activity are likely to improve. There is a new glamour thrown upon music and drawing; the children make songs for their plays, and our teachers of music find that these are among the best of their original tunes. Their verses occasionally develop touches of beauty. In the making of plays we run a chance, moreover, of uncovering some new dramatic material. In a class of mixed nationalities, might we not tap, perchance some native folk tales, or at least a folk belief of feeling, that not only might create a good play, but might stir a family or a neighborhood into joyful expression? And if we are making our play, we can make it fit our stage, our numbers—even the individual needs and capacities of our actors. If we have only one entrance, we will make our play in accordance; if we have no window, we will not have any one looking out of it. The critics tell us that the great dramatists have followed this course and are great because of it.

I have been describing a very simple play—one act at its best; such movement, speeches, ideas, as children can evolve; a thing educatively and pleasingly crude; fitting its childish actors. How shall such a play be presented? Again I want to emphasize the fact that we are considering plays by and for children, with an educational purpose, not plays for the professional stage, whose aim is to make money. We shall find our children corrupted by

that extravagant, gaudy, clap-trap kind of drama; we shall have to stiffen our backs considerably, to stand for simplicity against that baleful influence. In schools where there is no assembly hall and no stage, these theatrical dangers are largely eliminated, but so are several tremendous advantages. In the Francis W. Parker School, we all, from kindergarten to high school, meet four days a week for a twenty-five minute period. It is a hearth-fire meeting—the strongest force in binding the separate classes into a whole—the most socializing power in the school. Here we sing, read poems; tell stories; perform experiments; review class work in science, geography, history; and act plays for mutual entertainment and instruction. To have such an audience to play to is a remarkable stimulus to effort and increases the pleasure many fold and strengthens the social purpose of expression. Many schools, I know, have such meetings more or less often. It is in plays given under such circumstances that temptation lurks. We begin to hanker after finish. Of course we must have costume—don't they always have it at plays down town? Moreover, children love to dress up. Of course we must have artificial lights—it is more fun, and the effects are better. Scenery?—to be sure, all theaters do. And in a little while we are plunged into aping the extravagant professional stage, forgetting that we are none of us satisfied with the inartistic, spectacular emphasis that we find there, forgetting that we are teachers and not commercial managers, and that therefore our aims are quite different.

The usefulness of costume is double—to convey atmosphere and picture to the audience, and to help the actor to cast off his own everyday personality and to assume that which he is presenting. Under what conditions does costume really do this; and when, rather, do we adopt it merely because it is easier to follow established convention than to combat it with reasoned belief? For one thing, your actor must feel at home in his clothes. A suit of armor struggled into at the last moment will almost certainly make a young knight uncomfortable, physically and mentally. He ought to live in armor, play in it, study in it, go about his everyday tasks in it for weeks before a play is thought of. In our fourth grade for instance, where we study the Greeks, each child has a Greek costume, and early in the year he learns to put it on alone. After that, whenever he feels so disposed, he will slip it on for an afternoon's session, or a play period, or a rehearsal,

until it seems almost as natural to wear Greek as American clothes. Then there is no disagreeable consciousness of bare legs and arms when he appears costumed as an actor, but instead a joyful freedom of movement and a play of spirit. This situation can occur at its best only when the drama has grown out of a full background which has been building up slowly through a long period of class work. For another thing, is your mock costume sufficiently true to the intention of the real one to represent it honestly? Can your peasant really work in his peasant's blouse, or would it split at the seams under a slight stress? Is your knight's shield sufficiently strong to ward off a wooden spear thrust? For it is sentiment rather than vision that you are appealing to in the audience, and feeling rather than actuality that you want to create for your actor. A sword that has been through the Spanish war, buckled around a gingham shirt and hanging beside every-day knickerbockers will more truly inspire a knightly spirit than a whole suit of cardboard armor. A hawk's feather that your hero really found at the sand dunes, when thrust into a school cap, will easily turn anybody into a Robin Hood. The very spirit of adventure and the wildwood oozes from it. So it is suggestiveness rather than historical accuracy or completeness in costume that we need. I saw some first graders act Old King Cole with the greatest truthfulness, with nothing to suggest a regal court except a gorgeous red cloth hanging from the king's shoulders and upheld most grandiosely by two pages in twentieth century petticoats and Russian blouses.

There is, I believe, a third matter which we must keep in mind concerning costume. Is it helping to preserve that simplicity of taste which is every child's birthright, and which is necessary to the creation of right artistic standards in our public? This third consideration I believe to be the most important of all. To see plays all the way from Mother Goose to the Merchant of Venice acted without any theatrical props such as custume and scenery is good for all of us. It pares the drama down to its real essentials—interest of plot, beauty of language, truthfulness of impersonation. It throws the actor upon the essentials of acting—beautiful speech, interpretative gesture, truthful conception of character. These essential things stand up bare and signally, and we can see them. Our imaginations, too, are left free to picture more lovely drapery and more beautiful trees than any

costumer and scene painter could make. And we must not forget to give young imaginations room to grow. Ever present and insistent material cramps them. Let us keep in mind for the stage the maxim that Morris would have us follow in furnishing our rooms—to have the fewest possible things, only the necessary things, and to have them chastely made and arranged, with no cross purposes of line and color. Let us *imagine* a fireplace where we can, let us have one straight bench instead of three turned chairs. This simplicity has an artistic value of its own, and it better fits the crude acting of our child players.

After all, the greatest value of the play is not in the final performance, but in the rehearsals. The pedagogic usefulness of this final performance lies in its furnshing the motive,—the education comes in the previous training. Here every member of the class gets his opportunity to express himself. The conception of the play must become a class concept, must grow through individual contributions. One reads a speech, and another objects to the interpretation and shows how he believes it ought to be given. One invents a bit of action; another takes it up and carries it further. There arises a discussion as to the motives and attributes of a character. So in every child's mind the play is clarified and vivified, and the power of analysis and appreciation is developed. And in the training again, we must remember that the result we most desire is not the pleasure of the beholders, but growth in the actor. To that end we must strictly abstain from showing him how to act. We must, instead, help him to think. "How would Achilles feel when he answered Agamemnon?" we ask. "Then how would he look if he was angry?" "What do you do when you are angry?" An actor ought to say, perhaps, with joy and astonishment, "She is a princess!" but he bungles it because he does not feel the situation. In a moment we could show him how to say it and "get a hand," but instead of this primrose path, we must follow the thorny, tortuous trail to his inmost thinking. "When you last saw her," we say, "she was in rags, she was tending sheep, she was hungry, she drank from a broken cup. Now, how is she dressed? She is living in a great castle, she has servants to wait upon her, she eats from a plate of gold. Think of her as she was yesterday. Do you see her? Think of her as she is to-day. Now, what do you say to that?" And so, many times, and in many different ways, always only

loosening the soil for ideas to grow, never forcing the blossoms or twisting the branches. The best rehearsal, in fact, is one where the thinking is so constructive that the business and the dialogue change under the creative interpretation of the actors. It is only in the mechanics of technique that we have any right to give rules or examples for imitation and there we all ought to be trained to do it, and we ought to do it religiously. We make it a matter of life and death to teach right grammatical construction and then allow that grammatical English to be murdered by all manner of horrible speech--nasal tones, swallowed syllables, slurred consonants, monotonous pitch; and we allow interpretative gesture to die a painful death under smothering awkwardness and self conscious inhibition. I believe that voice culture is as much the business of a common school teacher as is grammar culture, or arithmetic training. And I suspect that the same thing is true of expressive use of the body. The play furnishes at once the stimulus for such drill and the opportunity for exercise of the skill acquired. Here is the opinion of an eighth grader on this matter: "The other great help to me from having taken part in this play has been in my speaking. Lately I have noticed I do not have to be reminded so often to speak louder and plainer. It seems to have made a lasting impression on my mind that it would be terrible not to make everyone hear in the exercise, and it certainly is just as bad not to make people hear in your own room as in an exercise."

Such close and conscious study as this we cannot expect, we do not desire, in primary plays. Little children act purely for the fun of acting; older ones think of the audience. In consequence, there is a necessary difference in the amount of preparation possible. The play in the first grade is a thing of the moment. Who will be Little Red Riding Hood? Who will be the Wolf? Where shall the Grandmother lie? Now on with the play! There can be no discussion of what the Grandmother shall say. If we must have a word on that subject, we shall have to get it by thrusting a speech into the Grandmother's mouth while the play is proceeding. Whatever criticisms we need to give must be given constructively and in bits, scattered thinly among many performances. Nothing must defer the joy of acting—not the learning of lines, nor the elaborating of dialogue, nor the perfecting of speech. And yet I think that even here we ought to allow no slipshod

work. By sharp but stimulating criticism, applied as I have just suggested, we ought to insist that a whistle shall sound as much as possible like a locomotive whistle; that when Little Boy Blue wakes he shall rub his eyes and stretch and yawn like a real little boy waking up; that is, the children ought to be growing daily in accuracy of observation and in truthfulness and completeness of expression.

In a grammar school, and in every grade of it, there is place for many kinds of dramatics. In the second grade, during a reading lesson about lumbering, two boys come up to the front, take hold of the ends of the saw, sway back and forth with a "Z-z-z," "Z-z-z," give a wise upward look, and step back, calling "Timber!" and watch the great tree crash to earth. It is over in a minute, a mere employment of the motor and visual senses to deepen an impression. At morning exercise a boy from a primary class runs in with a crook in his hand and cries out to a little girl, who is busily sweeping,

"Up, up ! ye dames, ye lasses gay !  
To the meadows trip away.  
'Tis you must tend the flocks this morn,  
And scare the small birds from the corn.  
Not a soul at home may stay :  
For the shepherds must go  
With lance and bow  
To hunt the wolf in the woods today.

"Leave the hearth and leave the house  
To the cricket and the mouse :  
Find Grandam out a sunny seat,  
With babe and lambkin at her feet.  
Not a soul at home may stay :  
For the shepherds must go  
With lance and bow  
To hunt the wolf in the woods today."

Then the lad is off, and the girl in pantomime places a chair for the hobbling grandam, tenderly puts a doll into the old woman's arms and is gone. If children are studying Greek sculpture, they play a game of posing as this or that statue for their fellows to

guess. If fifth grade pupils are reading about Vikings, they cut the description from one of the most dramatic stories, so throwing it into dialogue, and read it orally. An eighth grade reads Julius Caesar and acts scenes of it in a corner of the room. An older class studies As You Like It and gives it out of doors in well planned costume. A sixth grade girl makes a fairy play and gets together a group of children, who rehearse it by themselves after school, and play it for their classmates. A grade together work out a dramatic presentation of a story they have been reading and give it to the whole school. A group makes a May Day play and chooses a queen from the high school and attendants from the primary grades. Poets volunteer from everywhere, several grades dance around the May pole, and the whole school sings. Such festivals as this, combining several modes of expression, sweeping everybody into it, quickening the whole school into gaiety and co-operation and good fellowship, seem to me the most socialized type, the most broadly stimulating and the most paying form of school dramatics. What occasions shall we choose for it—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Memorial Day, May Day, Arbor Day, Hallowe'en? They must be the occasions which at once most deeply stir the emotions of children and which are most worthy so to do. Such festive celebrations will, I believe, do much to further social solidarity, as well as artistic expressiveness and well being. When municipalities are awaking to the socializing power of the festival, it behooves the schools to lend a hand.

## II. The Setting and Costuming of a Play

The eighth grade children chose to give the Nativity Play at Christmas time. From their study of the text they formed pictures in their minds of the arrangement, action, and background, according to their understanding and appreciation. They were interested when they found out that the subject of the Nativity was so generally used by artists, especially in mediaeval times, and they eagerly studied many reproductions of the paintings—studied the costumes, background, composition, and detail. They were interested in the different ways in which the artists expressed the same story, and in the symbolism used in many of the pictures. As a general thing, they liked the realistic ones; such as Corregio, Hoffmann, Bouguereau, and Lerolle. Very few liked Burne-Jones and Del Gardo at first, but later the class found them

most helpful and suggestive. These children very generally understood and appreciated the best expression of this story, because, with the motive of presenting the play, they analyzed the many expressions of the same ideal and made the effort to choose, adapt, and re-create, and thus to find adequate expression for themselves. This is what some of the children said about the pictures:

"When Mr. Merrill read the Christmas play to us, we thought of it at once as a beautiful picture. In planning the play we studied the pictures of the mediaeval artists. The pictures of the mediaeval artists were religious pictures, and many of them were of the Nativity. It was part of the people's religion in those times to make beautiful paintings. The very earliest ones did not show much skill, but they were more beautiful because they were so sincere. Later they improved in technique but lost in sincerity. In this picture of Fra Lippo Lippi's, there are peacocks on the roof, because they are symbols of immortality."

"I have the picture called, 'The Holy Night,' by Correggio. The picture is very sweet and beautiful, and yet so simple. We must keep these simple ideas in mind in the planning of our stage. I like the way Christ's gifts are laid before him. I think the shepherds ought to have some kind of a rod in their hands—something like the shepherds in the picture."

"Madonna with the Angelic Choir, by Del Garbo.

I think that the Madonna, baby and angels are very graceful and sad looking.

"The Nativity, by Doré.

I like the expression on the faces.

"The Nativity, by Hoffmann.

I like the sweet and holy appearance of the Madonna and angels.  
"Brown's Worship of the Magi.

The costumes of all the figures are very good. The positions are equally as good. The manger is very suggestive."

Sketches were made by the children of suitable costumes for each character, and color schemes, in water colors, were worked out, showing the grouping and proportion of the colors. By experimenting, the children found out that the proportion of color affects the beauty and harmony of the picture, and must be carefully considered. In most of the costumes, at least two colors were used. Should an equal amount of gold and of purple be used for the first king? Or, in case of one of the Marys, should tan or brownish-green predominate? These questions had to be considered in relation to the other costumes on the stage at the same



SKETCHES OF WOMEN



SKETCHES OF KINGS AND SHEPHERDS

I	GRAY-BROWN	CREAM
II	BROWN-GREEN	DARK B. GREEN
III	TAN	GRAY
IV	WARM GRAY	
V	DARK TAN	BLACK
VI	PURPLE	BLACK      YELLOW ROSE
VII	GRAY- ROSE	CRIMSON
VIII	PURPLE-CRIMSON	GREEN
IX	ROYAL BLUE	WHITE
X	BROWN-GRAY	

I FIRST WOMAN	VI FIRST KING
II SECOND WOMAN	VII SECOND KING
III FIRST SHEPHERD	VIII THIRD KING
IV SECOND SHEPHERD	IX MARY
V THIRD SHEPHERD	X JOSEPH

COLOR SCHEME

time and to the background and lighting. The making of these color schemes proved a difficult task, but the results were interesting, and many were beautiful and practicable. This work certainly represented much thought and concentration, and developed taste and discrimination as well. It also showed a growth toward the suggestive rather than the realistic standard, which we believe is educative and broadening,—for realism is expensive and ineffective and leaves no opportunity for the development of the imagination. We had much discussion, many good drawings and color schemes, and, finally, with the best suggestions and the help of the teacher, a color scheme and sketches were decided upon for each character. This is what one of the children said about planning the costumes:

"In planning our costumes we had to think a good deal about the material and color of each one. We wanted every color to be beautiful and all colors to harmonize. We tried to have the colors symbolic of the temperament and station in life of the character impersonated. Therefore we had a costume of royal blue and white for Mary. Royal blue and white are symbolic of purity, innocence and faith. We dressed Joseph in gray, because that color is symbolic of meekness. The shepherds wore skins, because the story tells us they were simple people. Purple and gold are symbolic of royalty, so we use these colors for the kings. We had poplin and chiffon for Mary's costume, because these materials fall in soft folds."

The Nativity Play opened with the two women talking by the roadside. A simple gray-green curtain was used to suggest the landscape, and the costumes were in tan and brownish-greens. Then there entered from opposite directions, the three kings, in purple and subdued reds, with gold and rich trimmings; and the three shepherds dressed in homespun and skins. They met at the stable door, which was represented, or suggested, by the gray-green curtain. When the door was opened by Joseph, it revealed a rough manger and Mary seated beside it. The soft blue and gray of this simple group gave the unifying note of color to this picture. The three kings on one side, and the three shepherds on the other, made a beautiful picture, and when Joseph and Mary were added to the group, it was a harmonious and complete composition.

It is our purpose, in this study with the children, to develop in them an appreciation of the beauty of simplicity. We expect the setting to stimulate and develop the artistic sense and the im-

agination of the children, both the actors and the audience. In the first place, the children presenting a play should have a definite picture in mind, including the dramatic situation, background, and costume. The background should be simple—a curtain is best when possible, because it allows the actors and audience a chance to give the emphasis to the acting without distractions. Too often lines and colors in the background divide the groups and spaces on the stage and break up instead of unifying the picture and action.

Some plays demand a more realistic setting—doors to open and windows to look out of. But these should be arranged to meet the demands as simply as possible. Naturally, children prefer a realistic setting. How shall we help them to improve and broaden their taste? We should plan to use suitable curtains and screens often, for we have found that if the colors are suggestive, subdued, and beautiful, and the children are led to compare the simple setting with the more realistic, and to judge of the effectiveness, before long they express a preference for the simple setting. But they must get used to it and form the habit of using their imagination before we can expect this result.

If the play is historical in nature, and if its purpose demands true historic representation, the children should learn about the costumes of a period, but it is not necessary nor always advisable to set and costume such a play with historical accuracy. When the idea is great or universal enough, the undivided attention can be given to making the setting artistic, and the question is one of composition in line and color—always keeping in mind that the important use of the setting is to help express the idea. In brief, these are the important things to work for:

- I. Elimination of everything unnecessary to the expression of the idea.
- II. Beautiful color scheme—sympathetic, suitable, harmonious, practical.
- III. Simple, quiet background—a curtain or screens if possible, of a subdued color—greenish, to suggest a forest or exterior; bluish, to suggest night; gray or brown, to suggest an interior. Or, if a more realistic setting is necessary, the background should be very subdued.
- IV. Suggestive rather than realistic costume when possible. This depends upon the choice of the play.

### III. Faculty Discussions of School Plays

From the beginning the Francis W. Parker School has been committed to the policy of developing expressiveness in its pupils by training them in various arts. The particular value of each mode of expression, especially of the drama, has been, however, a moot point. There were many individual and group discussions on the subject, but as a faculty we had, up to two years ago, come to no definite conclusions upon it. At that time four people formed themselves into a voluntary committee to study the drama as a factor in education. This committee succeeded in arousing, upon the part of every member of the faculty, a vigorous interest in school dramatics. Questions of suitable subject-matter, manner of presentation, stage setting and costuming, and the relative values of home made and ready made plays were discussed, as well as the deeper question of the effect of plays upon actors and audience.

At one faculty meeting every one was asked to state what he considered to be the values and dangers of the play. The following lists were jotted down as the suggestions were offered:

#### Values of the Play

1. Development of social consciousness.
2. Overcoming of self-consciousness.
3. Subordination of self to group.
4. Stimulation of human sympathy.
5. Multiplying of personalities.
6. Development of insight into character.
7. Cultivation of initiative.
8. Training of moral judgment.
9. Establishing of moral ideals.
10. Cultivation of literary feeling and power.
11. Cultivation of imagination.
12. Development of concentration.
13. Realization of power of the theater.

#### 14. Acquisition of information.

15. Broadening of literary acquaintance.
16. Training of memory.
17. Improvement of speech.
18. Giving of bodily control and freedom.

#### Dangers of the Play

1. Disinclination for less interesting work.
2. Over-stimulation of emotions.
3. Over-stimulation of self appreciation.
4. Blighting of imagination.
5. Tendency toward artificiality.
6. Encouragement of insincerity.
7. Inculcation of habits of extravagance.

Before the next meeting, these lists were put into the hands of the faculty, with the question, "What kind of play and what kind of presentation will tend to preserve these values and to avoid

these dangers?" By the end of this meeting, we had reached a pretty good common understanding of our beliefs as a faculty and our attitude toward the question of school dramatics. As the approaching summer vacation prevented any further discussion at that time, a new committee was appointed for the following year, to formulate a statement of our dramatic creed, both for the sake of defining our thoughts on the subject and for the purpose of establishing a standard for school dramatizations to which we could all subscribe and with which we could all try to make our productions accord.

During the following year the committee, after many meetings and much discussion, submitted a list of requisites for a school play. It follows:

#### **Requisites for a School Play**

1. That it shall be calculated to inspire, instruct, entertain or amuse both actors and audience, and to develop them in the ways indicated above.
2. That it shall be suited in idea and presentation to the age and character of those presenting it, to the size and nature of the audience, and to the place in which it is to be given.
3. That it shall have a central idea, and this idea not only one worthy of dramatic expression, but also one which gains a greater force from dramatic presentation than it could obtain from any other sort of presentation, from being presented through any other medium.
4. That the character of the play, together with the occasion of presentation, shall determine the elaboration of staging and the audience to be invited.
5. That properties, costumes and scenery shall be excluded except where they are necessary to convey adequately the idea of the play.
6. That whatever the idea, it must always be presented as clearly and as beautifully as the ability of the actors and circumstances of presentation will permit.

This list proved inadequate to express the belief of the faculty in dramatic matters, and the teachers suggested many additions and alterations. All this material was again worked over by the committee, and a final compilation was adopted by the faculty as a fairly satisfactory statement of the school's "Dramatic Creed." At least, it is the best form that we have yet achieved.

#### **The Purposes of School Plays and Dramatizations**

1. To afford to the dramatic instinct, through the use of an organized and artistic form, an opportunity for expression directed toward the

fullest development of the social self. An **organized form** is one that shows the relation of cause and effect and brings out the relative importance of conditions, events or characters. An **artistic form** is one that is beautiful in conception and presentation, and is adapted to its purpose.

2. To give to children, through the focussed perspective of good plays, a broader conception of the working out of ethical forces than their own limited experiences could afford them. This broadening comes from really living in the experiences of the play, and the result is a permanent strengthening, ennobling or enriching of the character.

3. To train and develop in imagination, in breadth of sympathy and understanding of human nature; in subordination of self to the whole; in depth and command of emotion; in ability to express an idea by means of speech and action, which implies fine enunciation and pronunciation, beautiful use of the voice, and good bodily control; above all, in concentration, without which those things are impossible. This training can be acquired through various forms of expression, but most vividly through dramatic art, because it uses simultaneously more senses than does any other form of art.

It will be understood that these values accrue not only to the actors, but in a lesser degree to the "assisting audience."

4. To give opportunity to shy and reserved children to express themselves, under the cover of a different personality, more freely than they could do in their own personality. To discover and wisely to develop individuals possessed of unusual native ability in the creation or interpretation of drama, so that such gifted individuals may early realize the possession and learn the true use of the power that should in time enable them to make a real contribution to our national dramatic art.

5. To establish: (a) An ideal of what dramatic presentations should be in content, literary form, and staging; and (b) a sound basis for judging dramatic performances. The creating of such standards in the minds of our young people will be a safeguard to the individuals in the present and to the tendency of American drama in the future.